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Land of the free and home of the brave? The media framing of Colin Kaepernick's 2016 National Anthem protest

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Land of the free and home
of the brave?

The media framing of
Colin Kaepernick's 2016
National Anthem protest

Steph Doehler,
The Open University (UK)



Context

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of colour. To me, this is bigger than football.”

Framing: “The process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (Entman, 2007, 164).



Methodology

| Publication | Number of articles (2016) | Number of articles (2020) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| San Francisco Chronicle | 100 | 32 |
| Washington Post | 86 | 45 |
| New York Times | 36 | 25 |

- Analysis utilized a constant comparative method, an approach commonly adopted by researchers to develop concepts from the data by coding and analyzing simultaneously (Glazer and Strauss, (1967).
- The flexible open coding guidelines outlined by Strauss and Corbin (2015) were implemented through the data analysis process.

Findings

| 2016 key frames | 2020 key frames |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| The action, not the issue | It's (largely) not our fault! |
| The military | Colin Kaepernick, the revolutionist |
| Patriotism vs freedom of speech | Time for change |
| Moral outrage to a discrete action | |

Discussion

- The findings from 2016 reporting illustrates how the media discursively concealed Kaepernick's intended anti-racism debate, almost exclusively evading the discussion.
- The 2020 analysis provides evidence that reporters reflected on the protest in a more appreciative and understanding manner. He was recognized as a social activist, rather than a social deviant.
- Nonetheless, meaningful reporting on racial injustice and police brutality lacked depth, with rhetoric suggesting that conversations needed to happen, as opposed to them actively happening.

Conclusion

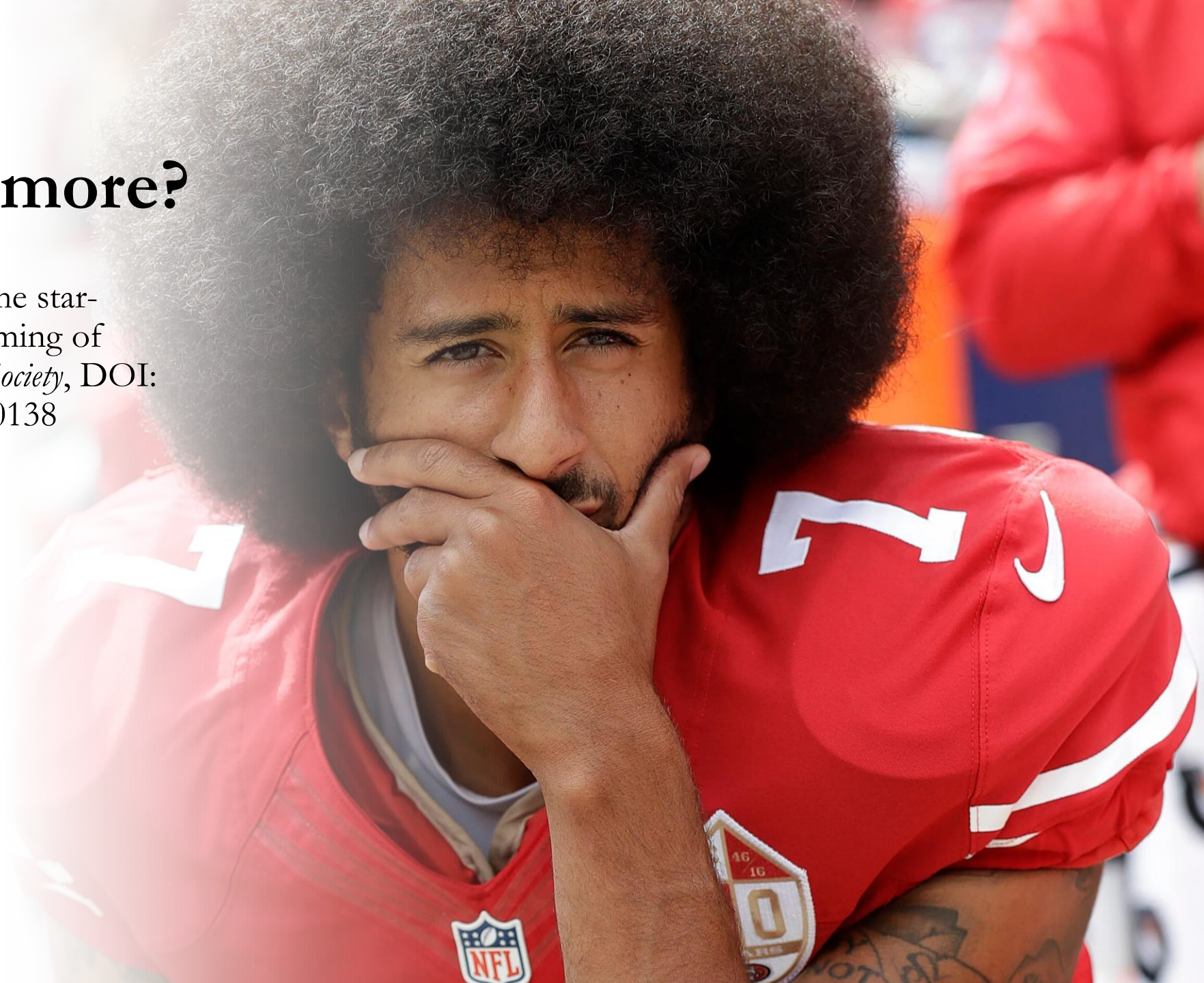
- Sports journalists are habitually ill-equipped to examine issues of race.
- The media's approach to Kaepernick's protest forcefully rejected the opportunity for a necessitated discussion concerning racial inequality in America in 2016.
- The media possess considerable power in shaping the narrative of protests and, as such, scrutiny into their tactics should continue.

Interested in more?

Doehler, S. (2021). “Taking the star-spangled knee: the media framing of Colin Kaepernick”. *Sport in Society*, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2021.1970138

✉ steph.doehler@open.ac.uk

🐦 [@StephDoehler_OU](https://twitter.com/StephDoehler_OU)



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- Glazer, B., and A. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.